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Message Text

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ACTION NODS-00

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, SY, IS, LE
SUBJ: APPROACH TO SYRIA ON SOUTH LEBANON

SUMMARY: AS FIGHTING DIES DOWN IN SOUTH LEBANON THE SYRIANS WILL FOCUS ON SEEKING RESTORATION OF LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY. IF BROAD LINES OF SOLUTION IN SOUTH LEBANON PARALLEL THOSE OF SHTAURA AGREEMENT, WE BELIEVE SYRIA WILL BE BETTER DISPOSED TO HELP IN IMPLEMENTATION. SYRIANS WILL PROBABLY FIND PROPOSAL FOR UN BUFFER FORCE UNATTRACTIVE. BEST OPENING MOVE WOULD BE UNEQUIVOCAL ISRAELI COMMITMENT TO LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY COUPLED WITH IMMEDIATE INSERTION OF LEBANESE REGULAR FOCES IN ONE WEDGE, HOWEVER SMALL, OF ISRAELI-LEBANESE BORDER. IT WILL BE DESIRABLE TO SHARE OUR THINKING WITH SYRIANS ON POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS BEFORE BEGIN GOES TO WASHINGTON AND ASSAD DEPARST FOR OFFICIAL VISIT TO INDIA. END SUMMARY.

1. IN THE WAKE OF ISREL'S ATTACK IN SOUTH LEBANON THE IMMEDIATE PRESSURE SYRIA FACES, COMING FROM ARAB WORLD RADICALS AS WELL AS SYRIA'S OWN PAST POLICY AND INTERNAL IMPREATIVES, IS TO SUPPORT THE PALESTINIANS. UNTIL ATTENTION IS DEFLECTED FROM THE ISRAALI ATTACK ON PALESTINIANS, WE CAN EXPECT THE SYRIANS TO SUPPORT PALESTINIANS POLITICALLY

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AND THROUGH MILITARY RESUPPLY, EVEN AT THE RISK OF ISRAELI COUNTERACTION AND ESCALATION. THIS IS THE MINIMUM THE SYRIANS CAN DO RIGHT NOW TO RETAIN CREDIBILITY AMONG THE PALESTINIANS AND IN THE ARAB WORLD.

2. SYRIA'S PUBLIC COMMITMENT IN THE LEBANON CONTEXT, HOWEVER, IS NOT TH THE PALESTINIAN BUT TO LEBANESE SOVERIGNTY.

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THE SHTAURA AGREEMENT WAS IN ORIGIN A PLO IDEA AND IN
EFFECT REPRESENTED ACCEPTANCE THAT LEBANESE SOVERIGNTY TAKES
PRECEDENCE OVER THOSE RADICAL ELEMENTS INSISTING ON FEDAYEEN
PRESENCE ALONG THE BORDER. THUS, AS THE FIGHTING DIES DOWN THE
FOCUS WILL CHANGE TO SECURING ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM
LEBANESE TERRITORY. WE BELIEVE THE SYRIANS CAN BE BROUGHT
TO SUPPORT A NEGOTIATED SOLUTION PARTICULARLY IF ITS BROAD
LINES PARALLEL THOSE OF THE SHTAURE AGREEMENT, ALBEIT
WITH A MORE COMMANDING ISRAELI ROLE. THE ISRAELIS IN
EFFECT HAVE ALREADY HALF IMPLEMENTED SHTAURA AGREEMENT
(PALESTINIAN WITHDRAWAL FROM A TEN KM ZONE), AND HAVE
PROMISED TO IMPLEMENT THE SECOND HALF BY TURNING THE AREA
OVER TO LEBANESE FORCES WHEN THEY ARE CAPABLE OF
ENSURING SECURITY.

3. DEPARTMENT IS STUDYING A TEMPORARY UN FORCE FOR THE
SOUTH. THIS APPROACH COULD CAUSE AT LEAST AS MANY PROBLEMS FOR
THE SYRIANS AS WOULD PROLONGED ISRAELI OCCUPATION. WHEN IDEA OF
UN FORCES FOR SOUTH LEBANON WAS DISCUSSED LAST MARCH IT
WAS MEN BY LUKEWARM RESPONSE FROM ALL QUARTERS. SYRIANS,
FOR THEIR PART, CANNOT NOW ANYMORE THAN LAST YEAR AGREE TO
A UN FORCE MANDATE WHICH THEY WOULD SUSPECT WOULD END UP
PROHIBITING PALESTINIAN ACTION AGAINST ISRAEL, BUT GIVING
ISRAELIS CARTE BLANCHE ON "GOOD FENCES" AND POLICE ACTIONS.
SYRIANS COULD DO THEIR BEST TO SEE THAT LEBANESE AND
PARTICULARLY SOVIETS SHARED THEIR OBJECTIONS. THIS IS NOT
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TO SAY THAT SYRIANS WOULD OPPOSE ANY UN MANDATE THAT COULD
BE DEVISED BUT WE ARE INCLINED BELIEVE THE DIFFICULTIES
MAY PROVE INSURMOUNTABLE.

4. SYRIANS WOULD FIND IT MORE DIFFICULT TO OPPOSE
A CLAAR ISRAELI COMMITMENT TO TOTAL WITHDRAWAL WHICH
BEGAN IMMEDIATELY REPLACING ISRAELIS WITH WHATEVER ARMY FORCE
THE LEBANESE CAN MUSTER TO TAKE OVER A SMALL WEDGE OF THE
ISRAELI OCCUPIED TURF. TIMING OF SUBSEQUENT WITHDRAWALS
WOULD DEPEND ON LEBANESE SPEED IN REBUILDING THEIR ARMY AND KEEPING
AREAS ALREADY UNDER THEIR CONTROL FREE OF PALESTINIAN
FEDAYEEN. UNDER THESE CONDITIONS, STIMULUS TO LEBANESE
AND SYRIANS FOR REBUILDING LEBANON'S ARMY WOULD BE COMPELLING
UNLIKE SITUATION OF PAST SEVERAL WEEKS IN LEBANON.
IN ADDITION, OUR SPONSORING SUCH A MOVE WOULD CLEARLY DEMONSTRATE
US SUPPORT FOR LEBANESE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY.

5. THE SYRIANS CAN PROBABLY UNDERCUT ANY MOVE WITH
WHICH THEY STRONGLY DISAGREE TO SOLVE THE PRESENT PROBLEM.
CONVERSELY, THEIR SUPPORT WILL BE IMPORTANT TO SECURING
PALESTINIAN AND LEBANESE AGREEMENT TO ANY SOLUTION. THUS,
WE SHOULD TRY TO GET THEM ON BOARD OR AT MINIMUM SECURE

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THEIR ACQUIESCENCE IN ANY COURSE OF ACTION WE DECIDE ON.
FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF GETTING BEST RECEPTION FROM
SYRIANS IT WOULD BE HELPFUL IF OUR APPROACH DOES NOT APPEAR
TO BE COOKED UP WITH ISRAELIS, AN ALMOSE UNAVOIDABLE
CONSLUSION HYA IF WE COME TO THE SYRIANS AFTER CONSULTING
BEGIN IN WASHINGTON. WOULD ALSO NOTE PRESIDENT ASSAD AND
FONMIN KHADDAM ARE STILL SCHEDULED TO TAKE OFF FOR INDIA
ON MARCH 21. I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE OUR THINKING ON THE
BEST APPROACH WELL BEFORE THEIR DEPARTURE.
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